

Front Office staffing levels and Rotas

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Job descriptions

A job description lists all the tasks and related information that make up a work position. It may also outline -

- reporting relationships
- responsibilities
- working conditions
- equipment and material to be used

Job descriptions must be worded in sufficiently clear terms as to identify the specific duties of the employee. It must however be made clear within the job description itself that the description is not exhaustive and the employee may be required to regularly undertake other duties. Job descriptions serve at least two purposes:

1. An important selection tool.

When recruiting a new member of staff, the interviewer and the prospective employee are immediately aware of the duties the latter is expected to perform. The interviewer may use the description to gauge the suitability of applicants.

2. A job description is useful in analysing a particular job and a person carrying out that job. This more or less depends on how detailed the job description is. In some cases a job description may be supplemented by a job list, which deals with each specific tasks. Go *et al* (page 204) consider a job analysis as an instrument which "identifies both the tasks comprising a specific job as well as the skills, knowledge, and attitudes required for that position." By producing a job analysis for an existing employee, a manager may then tweak a job description to cover duties that had been previously omitted (eg. specific tasks using IT) or remove tasks which are not in practice required (eg. references to a Whitney board system). More importantly a job analysis will assist the

manager to define training requirements (eg. a Front Office manager may find that a front desk clerk needs training on handling guest complaints).

The constitutive parts of a job description

Job descriptions differ from each other. However, one normally expects the description to be worded in a format similarly to this sample description provided by Abbott & Lewry (page 248):

Job title:	Senior Receptionist
Place of work:	Queen's Hotel Manchester
General scope of job:	To carry out reception duties as laid down in the hotel's operating manual, and to assist the front office manager in maintaining an efficient, helpful and sales oriented department.
Responsible to:	Front Office Manager
Responsible for:	Receptionists, telephonists, reservations staff
Main duties:	
	1. To have full knowledge of, and be able to act in accordance with, the hotel's fire plan and the Fire Act 1971
	2. To be fully conversant with, and be able to implement, the Hygiene and Safety Act of 1974 to the highest possible levels.
	3. To ensure that all guests and their requests are dealt with efficiently, courteously and promptly.
	4. To maintain a high standard of personal hygiene and appearance.
	5. To ensure that strict security is maintained in respect of all monies, keys, guest property and hotel equipment.
	6. To ensure that all reservation, registration and check-out duties are carried out as laid down in the hotel's operating manual.
	7. To carry out the duties of reservations clerk, receptionist or telephonist as necessary.
	8. To be responsible for the reconciliation and banking of all receipts and floats as laid down in the hotel's operating manual.
	9. To prepare all relevant statistics as laid down in the hotel's operating manual.
	10. To carry out any reasonable duty required by management for the efficient operation of the hotel.
Occasional duties:	
	• To carry out general clerical or administrative duties as required by management.
	• To assist management with the induction and training of new front office staff.

Personnel specification (or job specification)

Whereas a job description describes what a particular job entails, a personnel specification will describe the qualities required in a person to be suitable to carry out that job description. When a job vacancy arises, the personnel specification will assist the interviewer in conducting an effective and comprehensive interview.

Abbott and Lewry (page 248) suggest that an interviewer should consider the "seven point interview plan" adopted by the National Institute of Industrial Psychology. The plan recommends considering the following points:

1. *Physical requirements*

- A front office job has few physical requirements, but receptionists do rather more standing than is usual in other clerical jobs.
- Physical appearance is important, as front office personnel are representatives of the hotel.

2. *Attainments*

- Previous experience at a hotel front desk may well prove useful.
- Clerical experience or a position involving a degree of customer interaction will help.
- Interviewer should read a curriculum vitae with an eye to spotting significant unexplained gaps.

3. *General Intelligence*

- Staff should be literate and numerate.
- A Certificate in Accommodation Operations or City & Guild's should definitely be considered an asset!

4. *Special skills and aptitude*

- Keyboard skills
- Linguistic skills

5. *Interests*

- Interests will provide clues as to an applicant's personality traits.

6. *Disposition*

- Personality traits or qualities required by front office staff, eg. being conscientious, methodical, accurate, friendly, sympathetic, understanding, knowledgeable, enthusiastic, persuasive.

7. Circumstances

- A person's circumstances (eg. single, married, with children etc.) may indicate whether a person is likely to remain in the job and perform regularly and efficiently.
- Discrimination on the basis of a disability is illegal -

3. (1) A person shall be discriminating against another person on the grounds of disability in any circumstances relevant for the purposes of any provision of this Act, if:

(a) in circumstances which are similar or not materially different, he treats or proposes to treat a person who has a disability less favourably than he treats or would treat a person who does not have such a disability; or

(b) he treats or proposes to treat a person less favourably on the basis of a characteristic that appertains generally to persons who have such a disability or a presumed characteristic that is generally imputed to persons who have such a disability.

Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act, 2000

Abbott & Lewry provide us with a sample personnel specification. This can be modified to suit our own local requirements.

Post: Junior receptionist		
	Essential	Preferred
1 Physical		
Age		18-25
Health		Good
Appearance	Neat, well groomed	Attractive
Voice	Pleasant, clear	Acceptable accent
2 Attainments/Experience		Full time work in equivalent hotel
		Good reference
3 General Intelligence		
Secondary		GCSE or equivalent with English and Maths
4 Special Skills/Aptitudes		
Secondary		Typing Language(s) Computer Studies
Advanced Further		C&G Reception BTEC Diploma First Aid certificate
Higher		
5 Interests	Sociable, gregarious fluent, self-reliant	Persuasive, numerate
6 Disposition	Honest	Initiative, mature
7 Circumstances	Local	Live-in

Staffing Levels

One of the major difficulties for a manager in any hotel environment is that of determining adequate staffing levels. Inadequate staffing levels jeopardise the quality of service and may in the long run affect business adversely, over staffing will on the other hand cause an unnecessary expense. There is no magic formula to determine staffing levels. There are however a number of factors to bear in mind when determining staffing levels for your front office department. Abbott and Lewry (page 245) suggest at least six important factors:

1. *Number of occupied rooms*
Empty rooms will not generate clerical work or customer contact.
2. *Average length of stay*
The shorter the average length the larger the number of arrivals and departures.
3. *Pattern of activity*
Since the majority of guests in Malta travel by air on regular scheduled and chartered flights it is easier to analyse a regular pattern of activity when it comes to the arrival and departure of guests.
4. *Amount of personal contact required*
The presence of concierge and/or guest relations may minimise personal contact, as will automated check-in and check-out processes.
5. *Character of the hotel*
In a leisure resort a guest may well be willing to wait a few minutes at check-in, but business guests in what is perceived as a hotel catering for business clients will often expect faster service. Luxury hotels in particular need to avoid exposing guests to the indignity of having to queue.
6. *Technology employed*
Computerisation (automation of business processes) means less time is spent on clerical jobs and hence affects staffing level.

The activity pattern

An activity pattern requires a series of shifts to handle the various Front Office tasks, and may vary from weekdays to weekends. On weekdays there is increased morning activity when a hotel's accounts department, purchasing, sales and marketing, as well as reservations are fully manned. On weekends the strain of handling

calls, visitors and enquiries for these departments may be replaced by substituting for reservations etc as the case may be.

A front office shift pattern may create a few problems. Generally front office shifts are split into two: morning shifts or early shifts, and afternoon/evening shifts referred to as late shifts. In some cases hotels also utilise a supplementary "middle shift" which covers normal business hours, provide a continuum from one shift to another, providing backup for breaks and generally assisting the busier periods of the day. The first shift normally starts early, and the last shift finishes later than most jobs.

Shift patterns and staff positions have a direct effect on staffing levels. If a hotel adopts the once traditional method of employing separate cashiers and receptionists then the staffing requirements will reflect this. If however a hotel encourages the more modern approach whereby a front desk employee is in effect a "front office clerk (or agent)" then the number of employees required may be different. If the hotel adopts a day in/day out system (sometimes referred to as compressed schedules) the number of staff required may be even less.

There are other **scheduling alternatives**:

Part-time scheduling

Part-timers can replace staff on vacation leave, provide seasonal employment to supplement full-time staff during busy periods. They may and should ideally be scheduled regularly and not simply on demand.

Flextime scheduling

Some employees may be willing to work flextime which is ideal for situations where managers need to cover the varying workloads of all shifts.

Compressed schedules

This is akin to the day in / day out shift - and normally means that the front office employee will work four days in week and three days in another. In one week the number of hours may exceed 40 hours and in the other week will be less than 40 hours. Under our legislation when an employee exceeds 40 hours in such a situation s/he is not entitled to overtime as the hours or offset in subsequent weeks.

Refer to the Excel worksheet Staffing_Requirements.xls available at http://www.olivermagro.com/front_office_mgt.htm

Staff rotas - employee scheduling

Employee scheduling affects payroll costs, employee productivity as well as staff morale.

Front Office managers must be sensitive to the needs of their staff. Every employee will tend to have his preferences, but sometimes such preferences may be due to the circumstances of the employee in question. It is undoubtedly difficult to suit the needs of every member of staff, but the roster must be seen to be fair and in relation with the expected level of business.

Kasavana and Brooks (Page 398) provide us with a few helpful tips:

- A schedule should cover a full workweek, typically defined as Sunday through Saturday.
- Schedules should be posted at least three days before the beginning of the next workweek.
- Days off, vacation time, and requested days off should be indicated on the posted work schedule.
- The work schedule for the current week should be reviewed daily in relation to the anticipated business volume and unanticipated changes in staff availability.
- Any scheduling changes should be noted directly on the posted work schedule.
- A copy of the posted work schedule can be used to monitor the daily attendance of employees. This copy should be retained as part of the department's permanent records.

The EU Working Time Directive

When scheduling staff managers may be required to take note of a number of legal requirements. Member states of the European Union have been required to follow Council Directive 93/104 known as the Council Directive concerning certain aspects of the organisation of Working Time.

The aim of the Directive is to protect employees against the adverse effects on their health and safety caused by working excessively long hours without adequate rest. It provides for:

- a maximum 48 hour week averaged over a period of four months.
- a minimum daily rest period of 11 consecutive hours a day.
- a rest break (established by national law) where a working day is longer than six hours.
- a minimum rest period of one day a week.

- a right to annual paid holidays of 4 weeks, and
- night work cannot exceed eight hours a night on average.

The Directive requires that all Member States in the Union enact legislation which provides the minimal protection as outlined in the Directive. Malta will have to adjust its legislation to adhere to this Directive if it joins the Union.

Legal Notice 43 of 1990

In Malta, Legal Notice 43 of 1990 provides the minimum working conditions for employees in hotels and restaurants. The Legal Notice also sets minimum wages for employees in industry.

Legal Notice 43 provides as follows:

- Minimum wages are calculated over a 43-hour week during the summer months spread over 6 days, and a 39-hour week during the rest of the year.
- When a working day exceeds five and a half hours an employee is entitled to an aggregate break of one hour for meals and rest. (4(i))
- All employees in the industry are entitled to a day off in each week as a weekly day of rest. (27)
- Full-time employees are entitled to four working weeks and four days paid vacation leave, in addition to National and public holidays. (32(1))

The Legal Notice makes no mention of minimum daily rests, nor does it provide for minimum conditions for night work (although in some cases these have been established in collective agreements).

To read more about this subject refer to -

http://www.olivermagro.com/Hospitality_Law/Working_time_directive.htm

Bibliography

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